

Recidivism

OFFENSE TYPE

Recidivism has been the primary measure of success for offenders released from prison. For many years, the Planning and Research Section has run a series of Recidivism Briefing Papers to present recidivism rates on various demographics. The intent of this Briefing Paper is to revisit the basics of what recidivism is and how the Department measures it, specifically, by looking at offense type.

It is important to know that the definition of recidivism varies across jurisdictions and agencies. Recidivism is defined here as an offender's return to a Washington State adult correctional facility resulting from a new felony conviction or parole violation by an offender who has either been discharged or paroled from such a facility. Recidivism is measured within five years of the offender's release from prison. Offenders released from prison between 1985 and 1998 are included in the analysis of this Briefing Paper.

The overall recidivism rate for the State of Washington is 32.3 percent. This means that on average, nearly 3 out of 10 offenders return to prison within five years of release. Table 1 shows the recidivism rate by each release cohort and the year of return to prison.

Table 1

PERCENT RETURNED TO PRISON WITHIN FIVE YEARS OF RELEASE							
Release Year	# Released	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	TOTAL
1985	2308	10.2	9.4	4.7	4.2	3.4	31.9
1986	2661	9.3	8.3	5.0	4.8	3.5	30.9
1987	2919	8.8	8.5	6.5	3.7	2.5	30.0
1988	3247	12.1	10.9	6.5	3.6	1.4	34.5
1989	2873	12.3	10.0	5.4	2.7	2.2	32.6
1990	3229	12.1	11.0	5.8	4.1	2.4	35.4
1991	3312	10.9	8.9	5.3	3.5	2.8	31.4
1992	4078	8.9	9.4	6.0	4.6	3.1	32.0
1993	4301	8.8	9.8	6.1	3.8	2.8	31.3
1994	4515	8.8	9.0	6.1	3.9	3.1	30.9
1995	4520	9.3	9.1	6.2	4.0	2.9	31.5
1996	4684	9.8	10.4	6.2	4.3	3.1	33.8
1997	5131	9.7	9.2	6.5	4.2	3.0	32.6
1998	5302	9.1	10.3	6.4	4.6	2.9	33.3
1999	5618	9.7	11.3	7.1	4.5		
2000	6068	10.7	11.6	6.6			
2001	6469	11.1	10.9				
2002	6880	9.5					
Average ¹		10.0	9.6	5.9	4.0	2.8	32.3

¹ The average percent returned for each year is based on release cohorts 1985 through 1998 since those cohorts have had a full five years of follow-up time.

In comparison to previous analyses, recidivism rates by offense type have remained stable. Property offenders still recidivate at the highest rate (45.6 percent) and sex offenders recidivate at the lowest rate (17.2 percent) with person (31.6 percent) and drug offenders (26.6 percent) in between.

When broken down by gender, recidivism rates by each offense type are quite different. Males have a higher return to prison rate, 33.1 percent within five years, compared to 23.5 percent of females. Chart 1 shows recidivism rates for males and females by offense type. Property offenders have the highest rates for both sexes. Drug offenders have the second highest recidivism rate for females, but person offenders have the second highest recidivism rate for males.

Chart 1

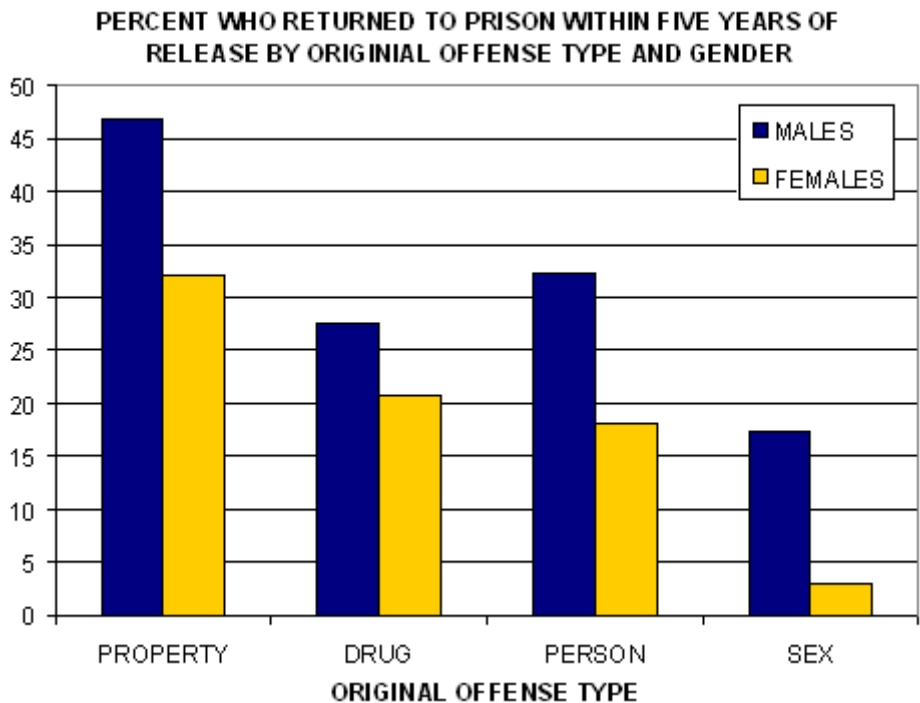
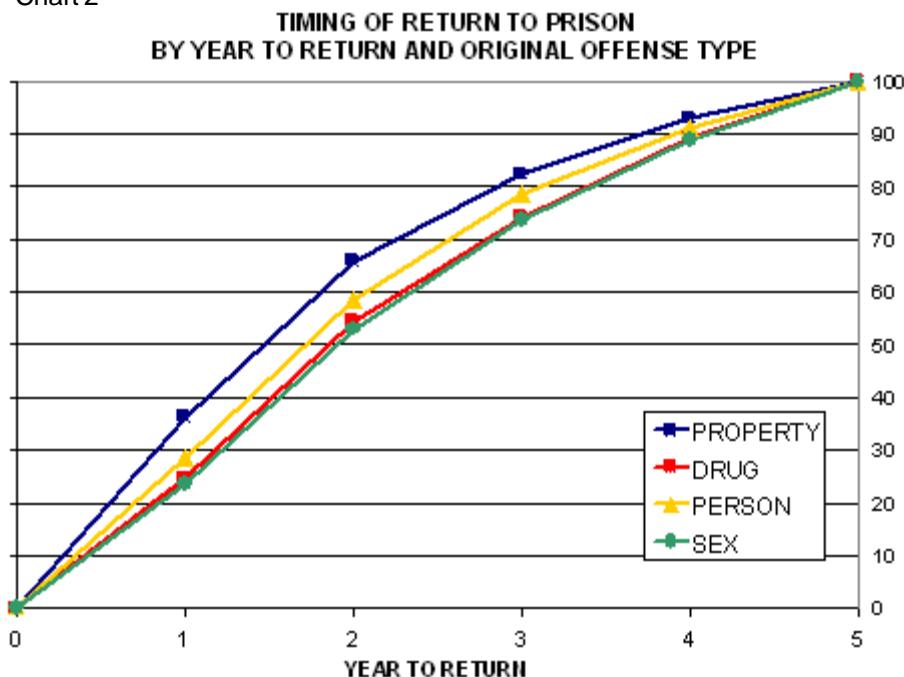


Chart 2



For offenders who do return to prison, it is important to know how quickly they become re-incarcerated because at-risk time has policy implications on how long offenders should be supervised in the community. Chart 2 demonstrates that property offenders return more quickly than all other offense types. Thirty-six percent of all property offenders who return to prison do so in the first year. Sixty-five percent who come back have returned within the first two years. There is not much difference in the timing of return between drug and sex offenders.

For offenders who recidivate within five years of release, males return to prison faster than females. Nearly one-third of the males who returned to prison came back within the first year of release compared to only 23 percent of females.

Chart 3

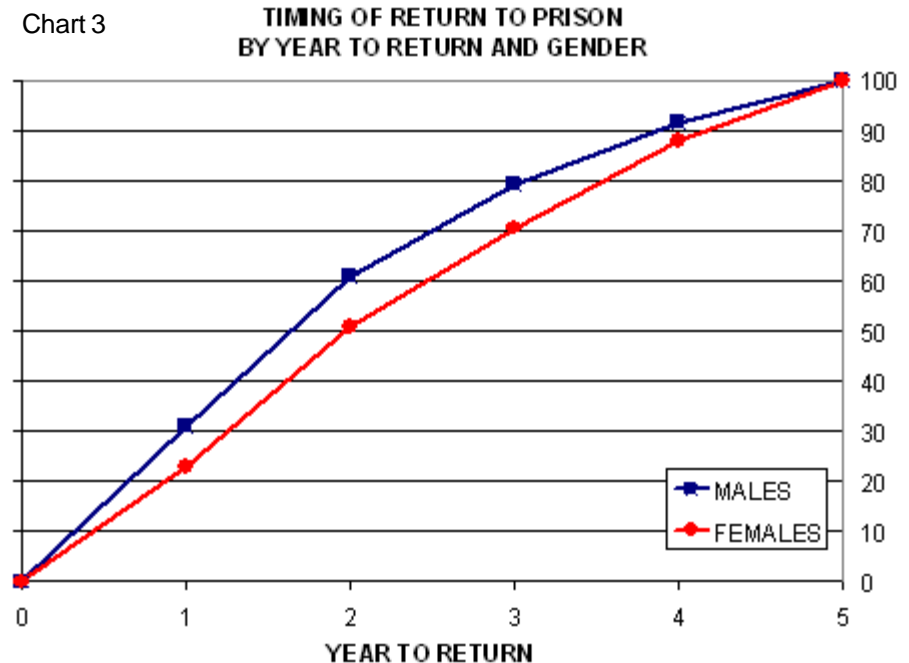
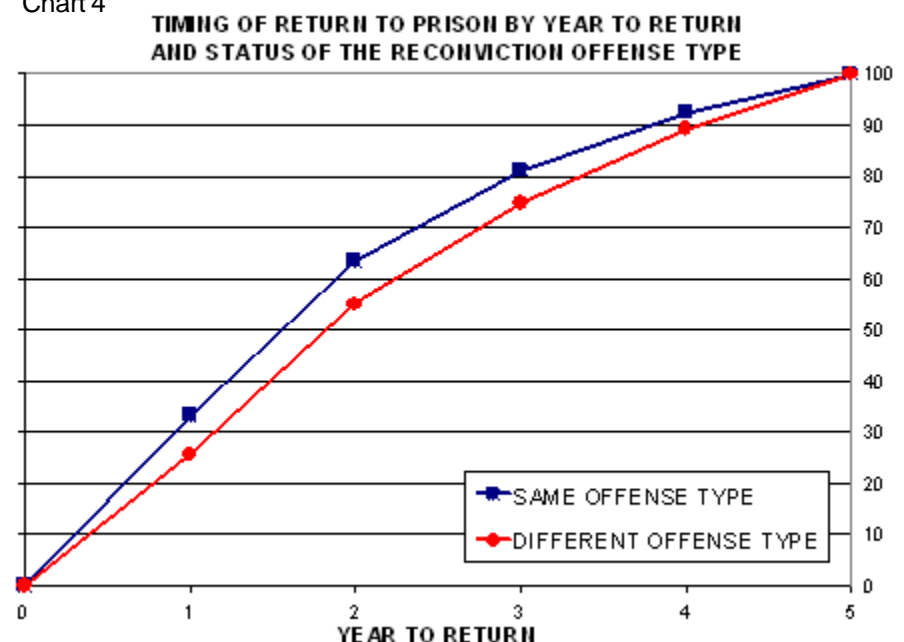


Table 2

PERCENT OF OFFENDERS WHOSE RETURN OFFENSE TYPE WAS THE SAME AS THEIR ORIGINAL OFFENSE TYPE BY GENDER			
	Males	Females	TOTAL
Property	66.6	71.4	66.9
Drug	65.7	67.3	65.8
Person	55.6	44.2	55.2
Sex	65.5	100	65.6

Offenders who come back to prison tend to be convicted of the same general offense category as their release offense category. Table 2 shows that over 65 percent of property, drug and sex offenders who recidivate are convicted for the same offense type. Person offenders are the least likely to be convicted of the same offense type.

Chart 4



It appears that offenders whose reconviction offense is the same type as their release offense recidivate more quickly compared to offenders whose reconviction offense differs from their original offense. One-third of offenders who committed the same offense type were back within one year compared to 26 percent of offenders who had a different reconviction offense than their original offense.